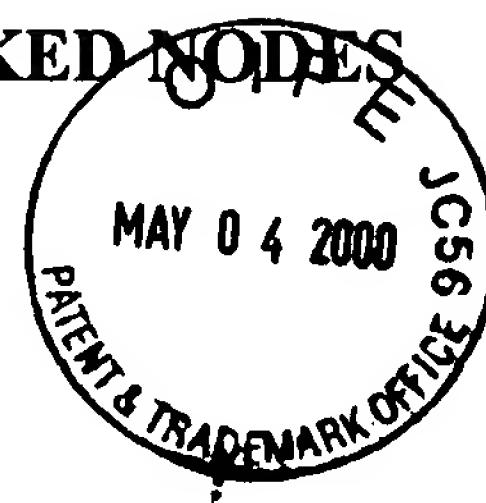


HIGH-SPEED NETWORK OF INDEPENDENTLY LINKED NODES



BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Related Applications

This application is a Continuation-In-Part of and claims priority to U.S. Provisional Patent Application Serial No. 60/134,294, filed on May 14, 1999 and entitled Neighborhood Area Network.

2. The Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to computer communications networks. More specifically, the present invention relates to computer high-speed networks linking geographically related users and to manners of implementing and operating such networks.

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3. The Relevant Technology

Computer technology is breaking barriers to inter-personal communications at an amazing rate. Already, it is possible to communicate almost instantaneously with anyone in the world that has a computer and a telephone line. Computer networks, such as the Internet, link individuals and various types of organizations in world-wide digital communication. The Internet has almost unlimited promise for communications advances, but is limited by an overburdened and somewhat unsuited transmission medium.

In addition to the Internet, businesses, educational institutions, government agencies, and other similarly related entities also communicate over much smaller-scale networks, such as local area networks (LANs) and wide area networks (WANs). These small-scale networks, particularly LANs, operate at much higher speeds than the Internet, but are expensive to operate at large scales. Thus, a large gap exists, between the scope of coverage and speed of operation of the global, but relatively slow, Internet and the faster but more